

an electronic pen that substitutes for a mouse and keyboard. Specially developed software will give officers immediate access to information about individuals under supervision. Further, officers can make electronic records of field activities and transmit and receive data to and from the office.

The Judiciary's study found that mobile computing will increase the productivity of probation and pretrial services officers by reducing the amount of time officers spend traveling to and from the office to obtain or provide information, and eliminating data entry of hand-written or dictated field notes. This will allow officers to concentrate on critical investigation and supervision work.

ENHANCING THE QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF COURT PROCEEDINGS

The Judiciary continues working on several automation initiatives to enhance the quality and efficiency of court proceedings. A summary of notable efforts follows.

Courtroom Technologies

The Judiciary is following a multi-year plan to equip courtrooms with a variety of technologies to facilitate judicial proceedings. The plan's highest priority is to include some level of courtroom technology in every new construction and renovation project.

The technologies include video evidence presentation systems, videoconferencing capabilities, electronic court-reporting systems that provide immediate access to the record, and courtroom access to information via external applications and databases. From June 1997 through June 1998, the Judiciary studied the benefits of these technologies through usage logs, questionnaires, monthly reports, and interviews of a number of courts using one or more of the technologies. Results show that the technologies can reduce trial time, lower litigation costs, improve fact-finding, enhance understanding of information, and improve access to court proceedings.

Videoconferencing in Judicial Proceedings

The Judiciary continues its efforts to achieve efficiencies by using videoconferencing to conduct court proceedings. Most notably, the Judiciary is making widespread use of the technology in prisoner civil rights proceedings. The Judiciary is providing videoconferencing capabilities to all district courts that have a level of prisoner civil rights case filings above the national average. These courts are using the technology successfully to conduct the majority of prisoner civil rights pretrial hearings. At the end of fiscal year 1998, 35 district courts (in 50 locations nationwide) were using videoconferencing for prisoner civil rights cases. The Judiciary will expand the program to eight more locations by the end of fiscal year 1999 and nine more locations by the end of fiscal year 2000.

The Judiciary created the prisoner civil rights videoconferencing program as a joint venture with state and federal prison authorities to conduct more efficiently prisoner civil rights proceedings. Due to its success, courts increasingly are using the technology in other types of proceedings as well. Examples include criminal pretrial matters, evidentiary hearings, bankruptcy hearings, client hearings, depositions, witness testimony, and appellate oral arguments.

Videoconferencing technology allows two or more geographically separated individuals or groups to conduct interactive face-to-face meetings with the ease of a telephone call. These computer-based systems also allow users in different locations to collaborate interactively by electronically sharing documents, spreadsheets, drawings, and other applications. Videoconferencing offers a variety of benefits. For example, it can save travel costs and avoid the non-productive work time associated with travel. Further, it expedites the handling of judicial proceedings because proceedings can be scheduled more easily, benefitting both the bar and the public. And, for proceedings involving prisoners, it eliminates the costs and security risks, borne by the Department of Justice and states, involved with prisoner transportation between the prison and courthouse.

Digital Audio Technology

The Judiciary is conducting a study through spring 1999 on the usefulness and cost-effectiveness of taking the court record with digital audio technology. Six district and six bankruptcy courts are using the technology to take the official record of court proceedings. The Judiciary will assess the appropriateness of using this technology in the courtroom, the utility of this equipment for transcribing accurately the record, the costs and benefits associated with this medium, and the technical requirements and specifications the Judiciary may need to adopt. After concluding the study, the Judiciary will determine whether to designate digital audio recording as an official method of taking the court record.

Telephone Interpreting

Last year, the Judiciary expanded to six the number of sites providing telephone interpreter services to other courts around the country. The Judiciary is developing plans to expand further the program over the next two years.

With telephone interpreting, the Judiciary provides court interpreter services from a remote location by telephone. This method ensures courts have ready-access to interpreting services when needed. Started in 1989 as a pilot experiment at one site, the program provides interpreting services in a variety of proceedings, such as pretrial hearings, initial appearances, arraignments, motion hearings, and probation and pretrial services interviews.

While program implementation costs have been negligible, the benefits are multifold. For example, the program increases the nationwide quality of interpreting services since individuals with advanced skills can be used more frequently through remote access, provides courts with access to quality interpretation services on short notice, saves travel costs, and facilitates the scheduling of court proceedings because proceedings do not have to be delayed for lack of qualified interpreters.

ENHANCED AND MORE EFFICIENT SERVICES FOR USERS OF THE COURT SYSTEM

The Judiciary continuously strives to offer better services to the bar and public. A summary of several major efforts follows.

Electronic Case Filing

In fiscal year 1999 and beyond, the Judiciary will continue efforts to develop a nationwide electronic case filing system. Electronic case filing enables judges, court